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# THE GRANITE MONTHLY

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# LINCOLN AND THE CONVENTION OF 1860

*By Gerry W. Hazelton\**

[Address delivered before the Wisconsin Bar Association, July 15, 1915]

It is needless to suggest in this presence that nothing new or fresh or original remains to be said of Abraham Lincoln. He has been discussed and considered and eulogized from every conceivable point of view, and by every order of intellect from the high school graduate to the most eminent of our statesmen, our diplomats, our scholars, our poets, our divines, and yet the people never tire of hearing about him. Everything his hand has touched is sacred.

An old school book, on the fly-leaf of which he once wrote his name, a sheet of paper on which he once figured up an account, autographs gathered by relic hunters from old legal files, letters bearing his signature, are prized by their possessors above all price. They will be handed down from generation to generation as mementos of Mr. Lincoln. Lapse of time seems rather to emphasize than dim the luster of his fame. He was never dearer in the hearts of the people than he is today. I fancy we understand and appreciate the far-reaching value of his services better than they were understood forty or fifty years ago. Great men lend dignity and character and splendor to the age in which they live. They elevate the standards of human achievement. They excite nobler ambitions. They become object lessons. They impart to the world an uplifting influence as eternal as the stars.

Mr. Lincoln was a composite of the most pronounced type. And it is only by blending Lincoln the man of sympathy and sentiment with Lincoln

the great leader and master of affairs, that we gain an adequate conception of the secret of his fame. No one can survey the career of this wonderful man without being impressed with the vicissitudes which his career discloses. Up to the time he reached his majority, his life was a strenuous struggle for bread. He had no opportunity to know anything of the world outside the Indiana clearing. He was denied the privilege and advantage of association with men of education and culture. His school privileges were negligible. The books he read were few and far between. He never saw a printing press until after he was old enough to vote, and yet this is the man who later on in life won a place in the ranks of the immortals.

At the age of twenty-one there was nothing to distinguish him from the farm laborer except, perhaps, his unvarying good nature. His step-mother, a noble woman, said of him, "He was the best boy I ever saw or ever expect to see. He never gave me an unkind word or look."

At the age of fifty-one he found himself at the head of one of the grandest governments on earth, and as he looked out into the future he was confronted with difficulties and dangers and perplexities that might well have appalled the stoutest heart; and yet it was in this position that by his wisdom, his sagacity, his patience and his devotion, he was able to guide the ship of state through storm and stress into the welcome harbor of peace and victory. This was his great work. And it was accomplished when he was called away. His great war secretary, Mr. Stanton, standing over his remains, as his tired spirit took its flight, ex-

\* Hon. Gerry W. Hazelton, a distinguished lawyer of Milwaukee, Wis., is a native of Chester, N. H., where he frequently visits, and was a leading speaker at the "Old Home Day" celebration this year.

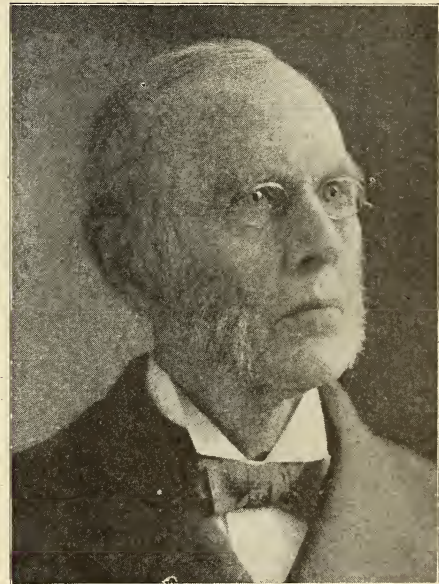


claimed, "Now he belongs to the ages." It was the remark of a profound admirer, but it was true.

I have said that Mr. Lincoln never saw a printing press until after he was old enough to vote. This was when the family was migrating from Gentryville to the Sangamon Valley in the spring of 1830. Lincoln had passed his twenty-first birthday just a few weeks before. It gives us a vivid impression of the straightened circumstances of the family to recall that all the property they had worth carrying away was stored in an ordinary farm wagon. All their farming implements, all their kitchen utensils, all their beds and bedding, everything they possessed, was stored away in that farm wagon. When the family reached the little village of Vincennes, while the mid-day rest was being taken under the native trees, and the oxen were turned out to graze, the young man sought out the printing office where the village newspaper was issued every Saturday morning, and there, in his patched and faded homespun, holding his ragged hat in his hand, he feasted his eyes on that primitive printing press standing there before him, little dreaming that later on in the century a momentous chapter was to be written on the pages of world's history which should lift a race out of bondage, and light his name in fadeless glory down the ages.

You will pardon me if I direct your attention for a few moments to the Convention which nominated Mr. Lincoln for President, and I may be pardoned for reminding you that this is the only opportunity you will ever have of hearing about that Convention from the lips of a living witness. It was a remarkable Convention in many ways. It was remarkable because of the vast number of citizens it called to the city of Chicago. The local newspapers claimed that a hundred thousand strangers were in the city of Chicago during the week of the Convention. Thousands

of them felt obliged to leave the city on the evening trains to nearby towns and cities where they could be entertained. But the people of Chicago were exceedingly hospitable. They threw open their doors and ample accommodations were provided for every one. It was a remarkable gathering for another reason. It brought together citizens from all parts of Illinois who came up to Chicago to promote the interests of Abraham Lincoln. They did not come as politicians. They did not come as partisans.



Hon. Gerry W. Hazelton

They came out of pure friendship for Mr. Lincoln. They knew him; they knew him personally. They had met him at the various courts in the state. They had heard him on the platform, and they entertained for him a feeling of sincere and earnest friendship irrespective of partisan affiliation which prompted them to visit Chicago to exert their influence in his behalf, and I haven't the slightest doubt that their presence was a powerful factor in securing that result. Now, to illustrate what I mean. In June, 1870, I visited a wealthy and influential

farmer in Edgar County in the central part of Illinois. He married a relative of mine, and I went down there to make them a visit. He told me about meeting Mr. Lincoln on many occasions and he said that whenever the courts sat in Paris, in that county, and Mr. Lincoln was there trying cases, or to try cases, that the jury-men and witnesses and citizens came into the hotel in the evening to hear Mr. Lincoln talk. Sometimes, he would talk about his early experiences in Indiana and the hardships to which the family were subjected. Sometimes he would talk about the distinguished lawyers whom he had met. Sometimes he would talk about the interesting cases he had been engaged in trying. Sometimes he would talk about farming, sometimes about stock raising, and his conversion would be enlivened with pleasant stories, and he said it was a charm and delight to sit there and hear him in those familiar conversations, and, he added, "I told my wife when I came home from one of these occasions that I had never voted anything but a Democratic ticket in my life, but if Abe Lincoln was ever nominated for President I should vote for him, and I did." And this illustrates the sentiment which prompted citizens from all parts of that state to come to Chicago to see what they might do to help the cause of Mr. Lincoln.

It was remarkable also for the patriotic spirit which prevailed throughout the entire city, on the streets, and in the hotels and in the Convention. There was a very strong under-current of feeling that the Republic was in peril; that the government was confronting great danger, and that impression emphasized the patriotic sentiment of those who were gathered in Chicago. I recall that the Montana delegates brought with them a most delightful singer, one of the sweetest voices I ever heard, and he came up to Chicago to sing the old national songs. It will be remembered that the songs of the Civil War were at that time an un-

known quantity. He sang "The Star Spangled Banner, long may it wave"; "My Country, 'Tis of Thee, Sweet Land of Liberty"; "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," and "The Sword of Bunker Hill," and the listeners cheered and swung their hats as they listened to this music.

The Convention was held in what was known as the Wigwam. This was a rude structure made of undressed lumber, and intended only for the purpose of that occasion. It was large enough to accommodate the delegates, the alternates, the representatives of the press, the national committee and a large number of invited guests on what might literally have been called the "ground floor," but for the ample supply of sawdust which concealed it. A gallery was thrown around three sides of this structure, with, perhaps, a capacity to accommodate five or six thousand people, more or less. The seats occupied by delegates were strong wooden boards supported by heavy chairs. The platform occupied by the president of the Convention and the secretary was on the north side of the Wigwam. Such was the enclosure in which a chapter was to be written not less important to the cause of civilization than the chapter written at Runnymede more than six centuries earlier, or the chapter written by our forefathers in Independence Hall in 1776.

The Convention was called to order by E. D. Morgan, afterwards governor of New York, chairman of the National Committee at 12 o'clock on the 16th of May, 1860. After an interesting speech the chairman introduced David Wilmot of Pennsylvania, the well-known author of the Wilmot Proviso, as temporary chairman of the Convention. Mr. Wilmot delivered a very eloquent and forcible speech on taking the chair and announced the committees, using, of course, the list of names that had been prepared for him by the committee and passed up to him. This included the committee on resolutions,



committee on permanent organization, committee on credentials and committee on rules. This being accomplished the secretary read off the names. The Convention then adjourned until the following day; at 12 o'clock on the following day, which was Wednesday, the committee on organization reported a list of officers, naming George Ashman of Massachusetts as president of the Convention, with a list of vice-presidents and secretaries. The president, Mr. Ashman, assumed his position and delivered a very delightful address, full of patriotic ardor, and called for the report of the committee on rules, which was made and adopted. The committee on credentials' report was made and adopted. He then called for the report of the committee on resolutions; in other words the committee on the platform to be adopted by the Convention. A very interesting incident occurred in connection with the presentation of this report. Ordinarily the report of the committee on resolutions is adopted without debate, almost as a matter of course, but in this instance it happened otherwise. After the platform had been read, and when the question came up on its adoption, Mr. Giddings of Ohio moved an amendment to the first resolution embracing a familiar clause from the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, endowed with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The amendment was opposed by the chairman of the committee on resolutions as not being a necessary part of a political platform, adding that we all believe in the Ten Commandments, but do not deem it necessary to say so in our political platforms. No one appearing to defend the amendment it was rejected, whereupon Mr. Giddings took his hat and proceeded to leave the Convention. Before he reached the exit some one shouted, "Mr. President," and all eyes were

turned in the direction of the speaker, and when it was seen that the voice was that of George William Curtis of New York cries came from all quarters, "Take the platform, take the platform." "No," said Mr. Curtis, "I can be heard from here." He then moved that the same amendment be incorporated in the second resolution, a question of order was raised by the chairman of the committee, which was over-ruled by President Ashman on the ground that the Convention had not parted with the right to amend the second resolution by declining to amend the first. This gave Mr. Curtis an opportunity to say what was in his mind in regard to preserving a record on the part of the Convention to which they might refer without humiliation. "Gentlemen of the Convention," he said, "I beg you to consider well, consider well whether you are prepared to go before the people in the campaign which is just before us in defense of the charge that here in this Convention, here where the free winds of heaven sweep over your teeming prairies, here in the city of Chicago, in the summer of 1860, you winced and quailed and refused to give your sanction to the words of the immortal declaration proclaimed to the world by our forefathers in 1776." The clear ringing voice reached every ear in the Convention. The effect was irresistible—like the sweep of a tempest. The motion was put to the Convention and carried with a thunderous "aye," and before the applause had subsided Mr. Giddings returned to his seat with a show of satisfaction he took no pains to conceal. I have heard many eloquent speeches in my time—speeches of great power—but I do not recollect one more effective than that brief appeal of George William Curtis in that Convention on that afternoon. The platform with this amendment being adopted, the Convention adjourned until the following day. Long before 12 o'clock on Thursday the Wigwam was crowded to its utmost capacity.

At 12 o'clock the Convention was called to order. The informal ballot was had, which was watched with most intense interest. Then came the first formal ballot. On that ballot Mr. Seward received  $184\frac{1}{2}$  votes. Mr. Chase received  $42\frac{1}{2}$ ; Mr. Bates received 35; 22 were scattering. Lincoln received 181, and his friends were jubilant. They knew what it signified. It should be borne in mind that outside the Convention was a great body of people, estimated at fifty or seventy-five thousand, just as anxious to know what was going on as those inside, and the committee on arrangements had provided for just this emergency. They had erected a small platform at the base of the roof of the Wigwam and had engaged a well-known auctioneer of Chicago to occupy this platform and herald to the crowd what was transpiring inside the Wigwam. After the first formal ballot the result was handed up to him and he proclaimed it to the crowd outside, and the report was received with loud cheers. Then, during the interim, while the second ballot was being taken, the auctioneer desiring to entertain the crowd drew from his pocket a piece of paper. "Gentlemen," he said, "give me your attention. I have received an interesting report from the Chamber of Commerce. You will all be glad to know its contents," and then he pretended to read, "dent corn, 62; flint corn, 66; pop corn, 71; sweet corn, 78, Lincoln, 181, and going up," and the crowd cheered again. It became evident, as the second formal ballot was being taken, that Lincoln was to take the honors of the Convention. When the result was announced it appeared that Lincoln had received  $231\frac{1}{2}$  votes; Seward 180,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  votes less than on the first ballot, and when Judge Carter of Ohio transferred 4 votes from Chase to Lincoln the requisite majority was assured and Lincoln was the nominee of the Convention. Interest now centered in the New York delegation. What would they do?

They had come to Chicago with the absolute conviction that their candidate would receive the nomination. They had seen his flag go down in hopeless defeat and their hearts were sore. I saw people in the galleries wipe their eyes as if they were at a funeral. A hurried consultation was had among the delegates from New York, and when Mr. Evarts arose and moved that the nomination of Mr. Lincoln be made unanimous, the scene which followed beggared description. The delegates and alternates sprang to their feet, cheered and flung their hats in the air, and hugged each other in a wild transport of enthusiasm; outside was heard the "boom, boom" of the artillery, and the noise and tumult of the people was like the roar of Niagara. I have seen a great many enthusiastic gatherings in my life. I have never witnessed anything comparable to this. It lingers in my memory as of something which occurred but a few months ago.

The nomination of Hamlin for vice-president quickly followed, and the proceedings of the Convention passed into history. It is true Mr. Lincoln had received the unanimous nomination of the Convention, but it is also true that Mr. Seward's friends and others labored under the impression that a serious mistake had been made in turning down Mr. Seward and nominating Mr. Lincoln. Mr. Seward had been in public life for years. He was the leader of his party in the Senate. His views were in accord with those of his party. He was recognized as a great and leading statesman, and it seemed to his friends that it was a very grave and serious mistake to turn him down and nominate a man who could hardly be said to have any standing in national politics. This feeling was held in abeyance during the campaign, but after the election it manifested itself in New York, Washington and elsewhere in ways that could not be misunderstood. Mr.



Thurlow Weed, one of our great journalists and one of the most sagacious politicians of his generation, had seen Mr. Lincoln during the campaign and had visited Springfield at the request of Mr. Lincoln after election to offer his counsel in constituting the new cabinet. Mr. Lincoln had entertained the sagacious visitor with pleasant and amusing stories, and it was disclosed while Mr. Weed was in Springfield that the President-elect had determined to appoint Montgomery Blair and Gideon Wells as two of the members of his cabinet. Mr. Weed was greatly disappointed. He knew both of these men; he knew they did not possess the qualifications which he believed the President should have recognized. Mr. Blair fell out early in his career as cabinet minister. Mr. Wells was suffered to remain as a sort of harmless functionary. Mr. Weed went home feeling that Mr. Lincoln did not appreciate the gravity of the situation. The simple truth is he did not know Mr. Lincoln, and I might add that no one knew him. I doubt if Mr. Lincoln knew himself. But the glory of it all is that the power was there, waiting to develop when the occasion called.

Mr. Weed wrote a very strong article in his paper, the Albany Evening Journal, two or three weeks after the election, in which he made an appeal to the Northern leaders in Washington to renew their efforts to bring about a compromise with the leaders of the secession party and to leave no stone unturned to accomplish that result. Of course, he could not explain his motive and it was not understood, but the article itself was very severely criticised. The secret was revealed, however, when, four weeks after the inauguration, Mr. Seward made the astounding proposition to the President to relieve him of the duties of the office and assume them himself. Of course, such an extraordinary proposition as that could not have been made except after consultation with party

leaders. It could not have been made except upon the theory that the preservation of the Republic was involved in it. On no other basis could it be explained. Mr. Seward must have realized his mistake when he read the President's dignified and brief reply. "The people," he said, "have called me to this office. I cannot transfer its duties and responsibilities to another if I would. I shall always be glad to consult with my advisers, but I cannot surrender the trust the people have reposed in me." Happily that decisive note settled it. It must have been a painful and humiliating experience for Mr. Lincoln to receive such a communication at the very outset of his career in the White House, and yet he made no complaint. He never even published the fact. It came out long after. A weaker man might have made this the occasion for a sensation. Mr. Lincoln was too wise for that. But the time was sure to come when Mr. Lincoln would be estimated at his worth. That time did come. The exigencies of the momentous crisis revealed his strength of character and the full measure of his resources and those who had doubted and distrusted, came to honor him for his statesmanship and to love him for himself. He disclosed a grasp of the situation which books could not supply nor diplomas assure. He was obliged on more than one occasion to overrule his great secretaries in the exercise of his own better and safer judgment. Not book-wise, he was wiser than books. Greatness was not thrust upon him, he achieved it. And when the end came and the white-winged messengers of peace were fluttering in the air, and Old Glory was streaming once again proudly from every battlement of the Republic, respected and honored by the nations of the earth as it had never been before, the world knew that his had been the guiding spirit of the crisis and that the rescue of the Republic from deadly peril was due under God to him.

In the last campaign a friend of mine being in Auburn called upon Mr. Seward's son, who is a banker in that city, far along in life. In the course of the interview the conversation turned upon the Chicago Convention, upon Secretary Seward and Mr. Lincoln, and the son said, in substance "Mr. Seward's friends, after the Chicago Convention, were greatly exercised over the result; they felt that a fatal mistake had been made in the nomination of Mr. Lincoln and in the refusal to nominate his father, but," he continued, "so far as I know there is no one, certainly none of my father's friends, who does not believe as I do that Mr. Lincoln was the only man in the world who could have carried the country through that crisis successfully. I believe my father could not have done it." But I must not detain you.

Great men like others pass from the ranks of the living when their task is done, and we speak of them as dead, but this is only a form of speech. In the higher and better sense they are not dead. They live on in their example and their influence. They live on in the splendor of their achievements. They live on in song and story

and on the pages of history. They live on in the traditions which are handed down from generation to generation, and from age to age. How often we have seen at the close of a summer's day the whole western heavens aflame with the radiant glory of the departing sun, so a great, grand life overflows the boundaries of physical existence and remains to illuminate and radiate the pathway of mankind. No man, not even the humblest, liveth wholly to himself. Out of the events which crowd our pathway as we sweep onward a master hand, tireless as destiny, is ever weaving the magic web of history, and it is our joy to feel that the commanding power and the transcendent sweetness of this devoted life shall lend a richer luster to the fabric and when generations yet unborn shall be looking back through the mists of time to the great historic struggle for the preservation of the grandest government on earth, fathers will still be telling their sons the matchless story of Abraham Lincoln.

The leaves fall and wither and the flowers perish in the north wind's breath, but the stars shine on forever and forever.

## GOD RULES

*By Amy J. Dolloff*

God lives and reigns with power unchanged,  
Though evil seems to hold full sway;  
Though justice seems a thing unknown  
And force of might the only way.

God reigns. His care encircles all—  
The weak, the false, the strong, the true.  
Eternal Wisdom plans our days;  
Faith will our waning faith renew.

Calm and serene as summer sky,  
When not a cloud sails o'er its blue,  
Our souls may rest, secure in Him,—  
Help of the helpless, tried and true.

Our God is with us. We shall have  
His Presence through the darkest night.  
So shall we bravely face the gloom  
That leads to regions of delight.





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